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ABSTRACT

Suggestions are provided for teachers wishing to develop a course segment on intercultural business communication, based on a hypothetical need for an instructional module in Japanese business culture. It is suggested that the teacher first read related materials and seek out resource people who have lived and worked in the culture. Module objectives reflecting the businessperson's need for cultural, historical, and social information should then be established. Content should touch on geography, popular culture, and language, and can be integrated with simulated negotiations involving the resource persons. Students should be required to study the American culture in preparation for studying a foreign one. A course progression from conceptual to theoretical and again to conceptual is recommended, beginning with a comparison of cultural characteristics and behaviors relating to self-disclosure in various contexts. Evaluation of the module should seek information about (1) the students' cultural awareness before and after the content was taught, (2) student perceptions of what content is most useful, and (3) colleagues' and guest participants' perceptions of their own roles and the instructor's role in producing and presenting the curriculum. (MSE)

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TEACHING INTERCULTURAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

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The instructor who has had no formal preparation for teaching intercultural business communication as an element in an undergraduate or graduate course in business communication, marketing, or general management need not despair when coming to grips with the task. Willingness to read up on the culture and ability to recruit representatives of the culture for classroom interaction are all that one needs to make an initial assault on the problem and provide an exciting pair of class sessions which will prompt students to pursue deeper understanding on their own.

Let us assume that students in a given course want to know what they would be up against if they were to be assigned to work in Japan. The perceptive instructor will readily conclude that a module on the subject should include key characteristics of the culture, western stereotypes of the Japanese, Japanese stereotypes of westerners, Japanese business protocol, and Japanese negotiation practices. Ways to provide this information are discussion with a country expert (presumably recruitable from among one's colleagues in other departments), videotaping of bicultural interaction in which representatives of the two cultures perform a common task (such as planning a picnic), viewing a film on Japanese negotiation practices and engaging in a simulated negotiation, critiquing the interaction and negotiation sessions, and assigning readings to supplement these windows on the culture.

Obviously, the instructor will need to do considerable reading on his or her own before attempting to recruit associates. A list

of suitable titles appears at the end of this article. By far the most important of them are texts in colloquial and business Japanese. Language is the one great key to culture. Familiarity with it, ~~if not~~ let alone fluency in it, facilitates adaptation to the culture and conveys assurance to the host national that the visitor is not simply a casual tourist but a person sensitive to the values of the culture. Francis Bacon was correct when he wrote (Of Travel) that the person who travels into a country before having some entrance into the language goes to school and not to travel.

By itself, reading will not be sufficient to ground an instructor solidly in the alien culture. Courses in language, history, foreign trade, and international relations can provide additional dimension to one's understanding, but an instructor usually is too busy to find time for them. So one must search out persons who have lived in the alien culture, worked there, dealt with business persons there, and can point out basic differences between values there and values here. These are the ideal persons to involve in the classroom interactions which invest the module on intercultural business communication with power to influence students positively.

Module Objectives

A module on Japanese culture should be designed to help students know what the Japanese people value highly, know important facts about Japanese history and current events, know what causes intercultural miscommunication in Japan, know which typically American practices might offend a Japanese host, and know what helps

a person to adjust to living in Japan. It should also provide clues to developing ability to see the Japanese as people who prize their individuality at the same time they contribute to the preservation and well being of the group. A well-designed module will prepare students to use Japanese terms of courtesy and greeting, explain American life to the Japanese inquirer without bragging or putting down other nations, and behave in ways that the Japanese people will respect.

Content of the Module

In a week or two of class meetings it is not possible to cover all of the following topics, but an effort can be made to touch upon examples of basic geography of the Japanese islands, selected historical events and personages, recent and current notable figures, popular movies and TV shows, sports leagues and competitions, major businesses (names, products, services), Japanese views of U.S.-Japan political and economic relations, major organizations (political parties, universities, religious groups), and the nature of the Japanese language (the writing system, basic phonology, and useful phrases).

Japanese aphorisms, figures of speech, and jokes provide good clues to "the Japanese mind." These can be gleaned from books listed at the close of this article and English language editions of Japanese newspapers (visitors to Japan can be asked to bring home some newspapers for this purpose), but by far the best way to

present these insights is in lectures and discussions with country experts. A few hours over lunch with a knowledgeable colleague should be enough time to work out a scenario of questions and answers which will blanket the field; the instructor asks the questions, the country expert answers them, and the students ask their questions in turn.

Once these basic subjects are covered, the student is ready to receive the content of the module which can be generated only by interaction with host nationals. This is the most useful content of all. A simulated negotiation can be arranged in which American students represent an American business firm desiring to do business with a Japanese firm and Japanese nationals represent a team of negotiators from the Japanese firm. (Teams of three or four persons are ideal, but this can be done effectively with as few as two persons on each side of the bargaining table.) Each team is provided with the conditions under which they must negotiate. The observers make notes and assist in debriefing the negotiation session when it is completed. Cultural factors determining the outcome are marked and explained. To drive home the learnings, a film on negotiating with the Japanese can then be shown to illustrate acceptable and unacceptable practices.

Further learning takes place when host nationals and Americans engage in participative decision making, planning joint activities and meeting outside class in social situations designed to afford more interaction.

In preparation for the experiencing of the module, Americans can be asked to study their own culture. Only as they begin to see what characterizes them as Americans can they hope to make meaningful comparisons with another culture's characteristics. This is where it is important to mention the stereotypes which Japanese citizens have of Americans and other westerners. Understanding these stereotypes will reduce the students' chances of failing in their foreign assignments and will increase the likelihood of their being better appreciated at home.

Methods of Delivery

A sensible progression in delivering the content of this module is from conceptual to experiential and back to conceptual. In talking with people of other cultures we normally begin by limiting personal disclosure and focusing on widest, most-likely-to-be-common understandings: the world, our topic, your culture, my culture. Then we narrow the focus: you in your culture, me in my culture. Next we move to: you in my culture, me in your culture. And that's where we stop until we become true friends, at which time we can go deeper and talk about: you (your hopes, fears, challenges, successes, weaknesses, strengths, uncertainties, dilemmas) and me (my hopes, fears, etc.). Rarely if ever will we get to: you and me (I hate you, I love you, I respect you, I distrust you).

Certainly in this module it will be sufficient to get to the level of discussing you and me in our respective cultures. Self-disclosure is not a Japanese trait, and any attempt to force it will

result in destroying the possibility of future openness and productive interaction.

Thus it makes sense to begin with a look at the dominant characteristics of our respective cultures and take note of how they differ. This is the conceptual component of the module. It is best delivered via lecture and reading. Next we consider how representatives of our cultures behave in situations where self-disclosure is not directly required but where interaction with people of the other culture is necessary. Then we return to consideration of how the observed behaviors have shaped the interaction and what might be done to insure better outcomes in future encounters.

Use of videotaping in discussions and negotiation simulations is a fine way to capture the interactions and make them subject to analysis. Here again, country experts can be invaluable. The business communication instructor can explain American or other western behavior; the host country national can explain the Japanese behavior.

Through participation and observation, the students are exposed to enough elements in the intercultural activity to promote further investigation. A well-balanced set of readings distributed at the close of the module can serve to generate still more curiosity and ultimate learning.

As in all teaching, much depends upon the instructor's ability to stimulate student interest. Most American students know little about their own culture but will be greatly interested in looking

into it once they see how people of other cultures misinterpret their behavior. So the instructor needs to begin by pointing out the stereotypes and their implications for behavior abroad. Other cultures are inherently interesting and will produce a high level of interest when presented by people who really understand them, have lived in them, or are born members of them.

Evaluation of the Module

At the start, one can distribute a questionnaire which solicits responses to statements which touch upon elements in the native and host cultures. By this means, the instructor can assess the degree to which students are already aware or unaware of the module's content. Similarly, at the close, one can distribute the same questionnaire, or perhaps a more complete questionnaire, which elicits the extent to which students are now aware or unaware of important factors bearing on intercultural communication for business purposes in the host culture.

One should also attempt to learn from the students what things they consider most useful in what they learned, the value of each part of the program, their assessment of the quality of each performer's contribution, and what specific actions they would like to take as a result of having experienced the module.

In like manner, the instructor should call for an evaluation by colleagues and other guest participants of their roles and the instructor's role in producing and presenting the module. Constructive suggestions for improvement should be woven into the succeeding

offerings of the module.

Recommended Readings

Brislin, Richard W., Kenneth Cushner, Craig Cherrie,and Mahealani Yong, Intercultural Interactions: A Practical Guide (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1986).

Business Japanese: A Guide to Improved Communication (Tokyo: Bonjin Company, Ltd., 1984).

Condon, John, and Keisuke Kurata, What's Japanese About Japan (Tokyo: Shufunotomo Co., Ltd., 1974).

Discover Japan: Words, Customs, and Concepts (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1983).

Inamoto, Noboru, Colloquial Japanese (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1972).

Kohls, L. Robert, Survival Kit for Overseas Living (Chicago: Intercultural Press, Inc., 1979).

Phatak, Arvind V., International Dimensions of Management (Boston: Kent Publishing Company, 1983).

Rowland, Diana, Japanese Business Etiquette: A Practical Guide to Success with the Japanese (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1985).

Weeks, William H., Paul B. Pedersen, and Richard W. Brislin, Editors, A Manual of Structured Experiences for Cross-Cultural Learning (Chicago: Intercultural Press, Inc., 1982).

Film

"Doing Business in Japan: Negotiating a Contract" (New York: Vision Associates, 665 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10022, 1977).